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Vladimir Lenin, Petty-bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism, 1905

Petty-bourgeois and Proletarian Socialism

Of the various socialist doctrines, Marxism is now predominant in Europe, the struggle for the achievement of a socialist order being almost entirely waged as a struggle of the working class under the guidance of the Social-Democratic parties. This complete predominance of proletarian socialism grounded in the teachings of Marxism was not achieved all at once, but only after a long struggle against all sorts of outworn doctrines, petty-bourgeois socialism, anarchism, and so on. Some thirty years ago, Marxism was not predominant even in Germany, where the prevailing views of the time were in fact transitional, mixed and eclectic, lying between petty-bourgeois and proletarian socialism. The most widespread doctrines among advanced workers in the Romance countries, in France, Spain and Belgium, were Proudhonism, Blanquism [1] and anarchism, which obviously expressed the viewpoint of the petty bourgeois, not of the proletarian.

What has been the cause of this rapid and complete victory of Marxism during the last decades? The correctness of the Marxist views has been confirmed to an ever greater extent by all the development of contemporary societies, both politically and economically, and by the whole experience of the revolutionary movement and of the struggle of the oppressed classes. The decline of the petty bourgeoisie inevitably led, sooner or later, to the extinction of all kinds of petty-bourgeois prejudices, while the growth of capitalism and the intensification of the class struggle within capitalist society were the best agitation for the ideas of proletarian socialism.

Russia's backwardness naturally accounts for the firm footing that various obsolete socialist doctrines gained in our country. The entire history of Russian revolutionary thought during the last quarter of a century is the history of the struggle waged by Marxism against petty-bourgeois Narodnik [2] socialism. While the rapid growth and remarkable successes of the Russian working-class movement have already brought victory to Marxism in Russia too, the development of an indubitably revolutionary peasant movement -- especially after the famous peasant revolts in the Ukraine in 1902 [3] -- has on the other hand caused a certain revival of senile Narodism. The Narodnik theories of old, embellished with modish European opportunism (revisionism, Bernsteinism [4] and criticism of Marx), make up all the

original ideological stock-in-trade of the so-called Socialist-Revolutionaries [5]. That is why the peasant question is focal in the Marxists' controversies with both the pure Narodniks and the Socialist-Revolutionaries.

To a certain extent Narodism was an integral and consistent doctrine. It denied the domination of capitalism in Russia; it denied the factory workers' role as the front-line fighters of the entire proletariat; it denied the importance of a political revolution and bourgeois political liberty; it preached an immediate socialist revolution, stemming from the peasant commune with its petty forms of husbandry. All that now survives of this integral theory is mere shreds, but to understand the controversies of the present day intelligently, and to prevent these controversies from degenerating into mere squabbles, one should always remember the general and basic Narodnik roots of the errors of our Socialist-Revolutionaries.

The Narodniks considered the muzhik the man of the future in Russia, this view springing inevitably from their faith in the socialist character of the peasant commune, from their lack of faith in the future of capitalism. The Marxists considered the worker the man of the future in Russia, and the development of Russian capitalism in both agriculture and industry is providing more and more confirmation of their views. The working-class movement in Russia has won recognition for itself, but as for the peasant movement, the gulf separating Narodism and Marxism is to this day revealed in their different interpretations of this movement. To the Narodniks the peasant movement provides a refutation of Marxism. It is a movement that stands for a direct socialist revolution; it does not recognise bourgeois political liberty; it stems from small-scale, not large-scale, production. In a word, to the Narodnik, it is the peasant movement that is the genuine, truly socialist and immediately socialist movement. The Narodnik faith in the peasant commune and the Narodnik brand of anarchism fully explain why such conclusions are inevitable.

To the Marxist, the peasant movement is a democratic, not a socialist, movement. In Russia, just as was the case in other countries, it is a necessary concomitant of the democratic revolution, which is bourgeois in its social and economic content. It is not in the least directed against the foundations of the bourgeois order, against commodity production, or against capital. On the contrary, it is directed against the old, serf, pre-capitalist relationships in the rural districts, and against landlordism, which is the mainstay of all the survivals of serf-ownership. Consequently, full victory of this peasant movement will not abolish capitalism; on the contrary, it will create a broader foundation for its development, and will hasten and intensify purely capitalist development. Full victory of the peasant uprising can only create a stronghold for a democratic bourgeois republic, within which a proletarian struggle against the bourgeoisie will for the first time develop in its purest form.

These, then, are the two contrasting views which must be clearly understood by anyone who wishes to examine the gulf in principles that lies between the Socialist-Revolutionaries and the Social-Democrats. According to one view, the peasant movement is socialist, while according to the other it is a democratic-bourgeois movement. Hence one can see what ignorance our Socialist-Revolutionaries reveal when they repeat for the hundredth time (see, for example, *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya*, No. 75) that orthodox Marxists have ignored the peasant question. There is only one way of combating such crass ignorance, and that is by repeating the ABC, by setting forth the old consistently Narodnik views, and by pointing out for the hundredth or the thousandth time that the real distinction between us does not lie in a desire or the non-desire to reckon with the peasant question, nor in recognition or non-recognition of it, but in our *different appraisals* of the present-day peasant movement and of the present-day peasant question in Russia. He who says that the Marxists ignore the peasant question in Russia is, in the first place, an absolute ignoramus since all the principal writings of Russian Marxists, beginning with Plekhanov's *Our Differences* (which appeared over twenty years ago), have in the main been devoted to explaining the erroneousness of the Narodnik views on the Russian peasant question. Secondly, he who says that the Marxists ignore the peasant question thereby proves his desire to avoid giving a complete appraisal of the actual difference in principles, giving the answer to the question whether or not the present-day peasant movement is democratic-bourgeois, whether or not it is objectively directed against the survivals of serfdom.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries have never given, nor will they ever be able to give, a clear and precise answer to this question, for they are floundering hopelessly between the old Narodnik view and the present-day Marxist view on the peasant question in Russia. The Marxists say that the Socialist-Revolutionaries represent the standpoint of the petty bourgeoisie (are ideologists of the petty bourgeoisie) for the very reason that they cannot rid themselves of petty-bourgeois illusions and of the Narodnik imaginings in appraising the peasant movement.

That is why we have to go over the ABC once again. What is the present-day peasant movement in Russia striving for? For land and liberty. What significance will the complete victory of this movement have? After winning liberty, it will abolish the rule of the landlords and bureaucrats in the administration of the state. After securing the land, it will give the landlords' estates to the peasants. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords do away with commodity production? No, it will not. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords abolish individual farming by peasant households on communal, or "socialised", land? No, it will not. Will the fullest liberty and expropriation of the landlords bridge the deep gulf that separates the rich peasant, with his numerous horses and cows, from the farm-hand, the day-labourer, i.e., the gulf that separates the peasant bourgeoisie from the rural proletariat? No, it will not. On the contrary, the more completely the highest social-estate (the landlords) is routed and annihilated, the more profound

will the class distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat be. What will be the objective significance of the complete victory of the peasant uprising? This victory will do away with all survivals of serfdom, but it will by no means destroy the bourgeois economic system, or destroy capitalism or the division of society into classes - into rich and poor, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Why is the present-day peasant movement a democratic-bourgeois movement? Because, after destroying the power of the bureaucracy and the landlords, it will set up a democratic system of society, without, however, altering the bourgeois foundation of that democratic society, without abolishing the rule of capital. How should the class-conscious worker, the socialist, regard the present-day peasant movement? He must support this movement, help the peasants in the most energetic fashion, help them throw off completely both the rule of the bureaucracy and that of the landlords. At the same time, however, he should explain to the peasants that it is not enough to overthrow the rule of the bureaucracy and the landlords. When they overthrow that rule, they must at the same time prepare for the abolition of the rule of capital, the rule of the bourgeoisie, and for that purpose a doctrine that is fully socialist, i.e., Marxist, should be immediately disseminated, the rural proletarians should be united, welded together, and organised for the struggle against the peasant bourgeoisie and the entire Russian bourgeoisie. Can a class-conscious worker forget the democratic struggle for the sake of the socialist struggle, or forget the latter for the sake of the former? No, a class-conscious worker calls himself a Social-Democrat for the reason that he understands the relation between the two struggles. He knows that there is no other road to socialism save the road through democracy, through political liberty. He therefore strives to achieve democratism completely and consistently in order to attain the ultimate goal-socialism. Why are the conditions for the democratic struggle not the same as those for the socialist struggle? Because the workers will certainly have different allies in each of those two struggles. The democratic struggle is waged by the workers together with a section of the bourgeoisie, especially the petty bourgeoisie. On the other hand, the socialist struggle is waged by the workers against the whole of the bourgeoisie. The struggle against the bureaucrat and the landlord can and must be waged together with all the peasants, even the well-to-do and the middle peasants. On the other hand, it is only together with the rural proletariat that the struggle against the bourgeoisie, and therefore against the well-to-do peasants too, can be properly waged.

If we keep in mind all these elementary Marxist truths, which the Socialist-Revolutionaries always prefer to avoid going into, we shall have no difficulty in appraising the latter's "latest" objections to Marxism, such as the following:

"Why was it necessary," Revolutsionnaya Rossiya (No. 75) exclaims, "first to support the peasant in general against the landlord, and then (i.e., at the same time) to support the proletariat against the peasant in general,

instead of at once supporting the proletariat against the landlord; and what Marxism has to do with this, heaven alone knows."

This is the standpoint of the most primitive, childishly naive anarchism. For many centuries and even for thousands of years, mankind has dreamt of doing away "at once" with all and every kind of exploitation. These dreams remained mere dreams until millions of the exploited all over the world began to unite for a consistent, staunch and comprehensive struggle to change capitalist society in the direction the evolution of that society is naturally taking. Socialist dreams turned into the socialist struggle of the millions only when Marx's scientific socialism had linked up the urge for change with the struggle of a definite class. Outside the class struggle, socialism is either a hollow phrase or a naive dream. In Russia, however, two different struggles of two different social forces are taking place before our very eyes. The proletariat is fighting against the bourgeoisie wherever capitalist relations of production exist (and they exist—be it known to our Socialist-Revolutionaries—even in the peasant commune, i.e., on the land which from their standpoint is one hundred per cent "socialised"). As a stratum of small landowners, of petty bourgeois, the peasantry, is fighting against all survivals of serfdom, against the bureaucrats and the landlords. Only those who are completely ignorant of political economy and of the history of revolutions throughout the world can fail to see that these are two distinct and different social wars. To shut one's eyes to the diversity of these wars by demanding "at once", is like hiding one's head under one's wing and refusing to make any analysis of reality.

The Socialist-Revolutionaries, who have lost the integrity of the old Narodnik views, have even forgotten many of the teachings of the Narodniks themselves. As the self-same *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* writes in the same article: "By helping the peasantry to expropriate the landlords, Mr. Lenin is unconsciously assisting in building up petty-bourgeois economy on the ruins of the more or less developed forms of capitalist agriculture. Is not this a 'step backward' from the standpoint of orthodox Marxism?"

For shame, gentlemen! Why, you have forgotten your own Mr. V. V.! Consult his *Destiny of Capitalism*, the *Sketches* by Mr. Nikolai-on, [6] and other sources of your wisdom. You will then recollect that landlord farming in Russia combines within itself features both of capitalism and of serf-ownership. You will then find out that there is a system of economy based on labour rent, which is a direct survival of the corvée system. If, moreover, you take the trouble to consult such an orthodox Marxist book as the third volume of Marx's *Capital*, [7] you will find that nowhere could the corvée system develop, and nowhere did it develop, and turn into capitalist farming except through the medium of petty-bourgeois peasant farming. In your efforts to scatter Marxism to the winds, you resort to methods too primitive, methods too long ago exposed; you ascribe to Marxism a grotesquely oversimplified conception of large-scale capitalist farming directly succeeding to

large-scale farming based on the corvée system. You argue that since the yield on the landlords' estates is higher than on the peasant farms the expropriation of the landlords is a step backward. This argument is worthy of a fourth-form schoolboy. Just consider, gentlemen: was it not a "step backward" to separate the low-yielding peasant lands from the high-yielding landlords' estates when serfdom was abolished?

Present-day landlord economy in Russia combines features of both capitalism and serf-ownership. Objectively, the peasants' struggle against the landlords today is a struggle against survivals of serfdom. However, to attempt to enumerate all individual cases, to weigh each individual case, and to determine with the precision of an apothecary's scales exactly where serf-ownership ends and pure capitalism begins, is to ascribe one's own pedantry to the Marxists. We cannot calculate what portion of the price of provisions bought from a petty shopkeeper represents labour-value and what part of it represents swindling, etc. Does that mean, gentlemen, that we must discard the theory of labour-value?

Contemporary landlord economy combines features of both capitalism and serfdom. But only pedants can conclude from this that it is our duty to weigh, count and copy out every minute feature in every particular instance, and pigeon-hole it in this or that social category. Only utopians can hence conclude that "there is no need" for us to draw a distinction between the two different social wars. Indeed, the only actual conclusion that does follow is that both in our programme and in our tactics we must combine the purely proletarian struggle against capitalism with the general democratic (and general peasant) struggle against serfdom.

The more marked the capitalist features in present-day landlord semi-feudal economy, the more imperative is it to get right down to organising the rural proletariat separately, for this will help purely capitalist, or purely proletarian, antagonisms to assert themselves the sooner, whenever confiscation takes place. The more marked the capitalist features in landlord economy, the sooner will democratic confiscation give an impetus to the real struggle for socialism -- and, consequently, the more dangerous is false idealisation of the democratic revolution through use of the catchword of "socialisation". Such is the conclusion to be drawn from the fact that landlord economy is a mixture of capitalism and serf-ownership relations.

Thus, we must combine the purely proletarian struggle with the general peasant struggle, but not confuse the two. We must support the general democratic and general peasant struggle, but not become submerged in this non-class struggle; we must never idealise it with false catchwords such as "socialisation", or ever forget the necessity of organising both the urban and the rural proletariat in an entirely independent class party of Social-Democracy. While giving the utmost support to the most determined democratism, that party will not allow itself to be diverted

from the revolutionary path by reactionary dreams and experiments in "equalisation" under the system of commodity production. The peasants' struggle against the landlords is now a revolutionary struggle; the confiscation of the landlords' estates at the present stage of economic and political evolution is revolutionary in every respect, and we back this revolutionary-democratic measure. However, to call this measure "socialisation", and to deceive oneself and the people concerning the possibility of "equality" in land tenure under the system of commodity production, is a reactionary petty-bourgeois utopia, which we leave to the socialist-reactionaries.

Footnotes (selected)

[1] *Proudhonism* -- a school of thought named after Pierre Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865), a French petty-bourgeois socialist and anarchist. Though a sharp critic of capitalist society, Proudhon failed to understand that the only way to end poverty, inequality, exploitation and other evils of capitalist relations is to abolish these relations.

Blanquism -- a trend in the French socialist movement represented by the prominent revolutionary and exponent of utopian communism Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881). The Blanquists, Lenin wrote, "expected that mankind will be emancipated from wage slavery, not by the proletarian class struggle, but through a conspiracy hatched by a small minority of intellectuals" (V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol. 10, p.392). p.5

[2] *Narodism* -- a petty-bourgeois trend in the Russian revolutionary movement of the 1860s and 1870s. p.6

[3] A reference to the revolutionary actions of the peasants of Poltava and Kharkov gubernias in the Ukraine (Little Russia) at the end of March and the beginning of April 1902. They were precipitated by the extremely hard condition of the peasants aggravated by crop failure and famine. The peasants attacked landowners' estates, seized food and forage, and demanded redistribution of the land. The movement was put down with severity. p.6

[4] *Bernsteinism* -- an opportunist trend in the international Social-Democratic movement at the close of the nineteenth century. It took its name from the revisionist, Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), leader of the extreme Right wing of the German Social-Democratic Party and the Second International. Bernstein opposed revolutionary struggle by the working class and the dictatorship of the proletariat, preached collaboration of the proletariat and bourgeoisie, and brandished his notorious slogan, "the movement is everything, the final aim is nothing", substituting struggle for reforms within the framework of the bourgeois state for the revolutionary struggle for socialism. p.6

[5] *Socialist-Revolutionaries* (S.R.s) -- a petty-bourgeois party in Russia formed at the end of 1901 and the beginning of 1902. Its official organs were the newspaper *Revolutsionnaya Rossiya* (Revolutionary Russia) (1900-05) and the magazine *Vestnik Russkoi Revolutsii* (Herald of the Russian Revolution) (1901-05). p.6

Chapter II: The Adaptation of Capital

According to Bernstein, the credit system, the perfected means of communication and the new capitalist combines are the important factors that forward the adaptation of capitalist economy.

Credit has diverse applications in capitalism. Its two most important functions are to extend production and to facilitate exchange. When the inner tendency of capitalist production to extend boundlessly strikes against the restricted dimensions of private property, credit appears as a means of surmounting these limits in a particular capitalist manner. Credit, through shareholding, combines in one magnitude of capital a large number of individual capitals. It makes available to each capitalist the use of other capitalists' money—in the form of industrial credit. As commercial credit it accelerates the exchange of commodities and therefore the return of capital into production, and thus aids the entire cycle of the process of production. The manner in which these two principle functions of credit influence the formation of crises is quite obvious. If it is true that crises appear as a result of the contradiction existing between the capacity of extension, the tendency of production to increase, and the restricted consumption capacity of the market, credit is precisely, in view of what was stated above, the specific means that makes this contradiction break out as often as possible. To begin with, it increases disproportionately the capacity of the extension of production and thus constitutes an inner motive force that is constantly pushing production to exceed the limits of the market. But credit strikes from two sides. After having (as a factor of the process of production) provoked overproduction, credit (as a factor of exchange) destroys, during the crisis, the very productive forces it itself created. At the first symptom of the crisis, credit melts away. It abandons exchange where it would still be found indispensable, and appearing instead, ineffective and useless, there where some exchange still continues, it reduces to a minimum the consumption capacity of the market.

Besides having these two principal results, credit also influences the formation of crises in the following ways. It constitutes the technical means of making available to an entrepreneur the capital of other owners. It stimulates at the same time the bold and unscrupulous utilisation of the property of others. That is, it leads to speculation. Credit not only aggravates the crisis in its capacity as a dissembled means of exchange, it also helps to bring and extend the crisis by transforming all exchange into an extremely complex and artificial mechanism that, having a minimum of metallic money as a real base, is easily disarranged at the slightest occasion.

We see that credit, instead of being an instrument for the suppression or the attenuation of crises, is on the contrary a particularly mighty instrument for the formation of crises. It cannot be anything else. Credit eliminates the remaining rigidity of capitalist relationships. It introduces everywhere the greatest elasticity possible. It renders all capitalist forces extensible, relative and mutually sensitive to the highest degree. Doing this, it facilitates and aggravates crises, which are nothing more or less than the periodic collisions of the contradictory forces of capitalist economy.

That leads us to another question. Why does credit generally have the appearance of a "means of adaptation" of capitalism? No matter what the relation or form in which this "adaptation" is represented by certain people, it can obviously consist only of the power to suppress one of the several antagonistic relations of capitalist economy, that is, of the power to suppress or weaken one of these contradictions, and allow liberty of movement, at one point or another, to the other fettered productive forces. In fact, it is precisely credit that aggravates these contradictions to the highest degree. It aggravates the antagonism between the mode of production and the mode of exchange by stretching production to the limit and at the same time paralysing exchange at the smallest pretext. It aggravates the antagonism between the mode of production and the mode of appropriation by separating production from ownership, that is, by transforming the capital employed in production into "social" capital and at the same time transforming a part of the profit, in the form of interest on capital, into a simple title of ownership. It aggravates the antagonism existing between the property relations (ownership) and the relations of production by putting into a small number of hands immense productive forces and expropriating large numbers of small capitalists. Lastly, it aggravates the antagonism existing between social character of production and private capitalist ownership by rendering necessary the intervention of the State in production.

In short, credit reproduces all the fundamental antagonisms of the capitalist world. It accentuates them. It precipitates their development and thus pushes the capitalist world forward to its own destruction. The prime act of capitalist adaptation, as far as credit is concerned, should really consist in breaking and suppressing credit. In fact, credit is far from being a means of capitalist adaptation. It is, on the contrary, a means of destruction of the most extreme revolutionary significance. Has not this revolutionary character of credit actually inspired plans of "socialist" reform? As such, it has had some distinguished proponents, some of whom (Isaac Pereira in France), were, as Marx put it, half prophets, half rogues.

Just as fragile is the second "means of adaptation": employers' organisations. According to Bernstein, such organisations will put an end to anarchy of production and do away with crises through their regulation of production. The multiple repercussions of the development of cartels and trusts have not been considered

too carefully up to now. But they predict a problem that can only be solved with the aid of Marxist theory.

One thing is certain. We could speak of a damming up of capitalist anarchy through the agency of capitalist combines only in the measure that cartels, trusts, etc., become, even approximately, the dominant form of production. But such a possibility is excluded by the very nature of cartels. The final economic aim and result of combines is the following. Through the suppression of competition in a given branch of production, the distribution of the mass of profit realised on the market is influenced in such a manner that there is an increase of the share going to this branch of industry. Such organisation of the field can increase the rate of profit in one branch of industry at the expense of another. That is precisely why it cannot be generalised, for when it is extended to all important branches of industry, this tendency suppresses its own influence.

Furthermore, within the limits of their practical application the result of combines is the very opposite of suppression of industrial anarchy. Cartels ordinarily succeed in obtaining an increase of profit, in the home market, by producing at a lower rate of profit for the foreign market, thus utilising the supplementary portions of capital which they cannot utilise for domestic needs. That is to say, they sell abroad cheaper than at home. The result is the sharpening of competition abroad—the very opposite of what certain people want to find. That is well demonstrated by the history of the world sugar industry.

Generally speaking, combines treated as a manifestation of the capitalist mode of production, can only be considered a definite phase of capitalist development. Cartels are fundamentally nothing else than a means resorted to by the capitalist mode of production for the purpose of holding back the fatal fall of the rate of profit in certain branches of production. What method do cartels employ for this end? That of keeping inactive a part of the accumulated capital. That is, they use the same method which in another form is employed in crises. The remedy and the illness resemble each other like two drops of water. Indeed the first can be considered the lesser evil only up to a certain point. When the outlets of disposal begin to shrink, and the world market has been extended to its limit and has become exhausted through the competition of the capitalist countries—and sooner or later that is bound to come—then the forced partial idleness of capital will reach such dimensions that the remedy will become transformed into a malady, and capital, already pretty much "socialised" through regulation, will tend to revert again to the form of individual capital. In the face of the increased difficulties of finding markets, each individual portion of capital will prefer to take its chances alone. At that time, the large regulating organisations will burst like soap bubbles and give way to aggravated competition.

In a general way, cartels, just like credit, appear therefore as a determined phase of capitalist development, which in the last analysis aggravates the anarchy of the capitalist world and expresses and ripens its internal contradictions. Cartels aggravate the antagonism existing between the mode of production and exchange by sharpening the struggle between the producer and consumer, as is the case especially in the United States. They aggravate, furthermore, the antagonism existing between the mode of production and the mode of appropriation by opposing, in the most brutal fashion, to the working class the superior force of organised capital, and thus increasing the antagonism between Capital and Labour.

Finally, capitalist combinations aggravate the contradiction existing between the international character of capitalist world economy and the national character of the State—insofar as they are always accompanied by a general tariff war, which sharpens the differences among the capitalist States. We must add to this the decidedly revolutionary influence exercised by cartels on the concentration of production, technical progress, etc.

In other words, when evaluated from the angle of their final effect on capitalist economy, cartels and trusts fail as "means of adaptation." They fail to attenuate the contradictions of capitalism. On the contrary, they appear to be an instrument of greater anarchy. They encourage the further development of the internal contradictions of capitalism. They accelerate the coming of a general decline of capitalism.

But if the credit system, cartels, and the rest do not suppress the anarchy of capitalism, why have we not had a major commercial crisis for two decades, since 1873? Is this not a sign that, contrary to Marx's analysis the capitalist mode of production has adapted itself—at least, in a general way—to the needs of society? Hardly had Bernstein rejected, in 1898, Marx's theory of crises, when a profound general crisis broke out in 1900, while seven years later, a new crisis beginning in the United States, hit the world market. Facts proved the theory of "adaptation" to be false. They showed at the same time that the people who abandoned Marx's theory of crisis only because no crisis occurred within a certain space of time merely confused the essence of this theory with one of its secondary exterior aspects—the ten-year cycle. The description of the cycle of modern capitalist industry as a ten-year period was to Marx and Engels, in 1860 and 1870, only a simple statement of facts. It was not based on a natural law but on a series of given historic circumstances that were connected with the rapidly spreading activity of young capitalism.

The crisis of 1825 was in effect, the result of extensive investment of capital in the construction of roads, canals, gas works, which took place during the preceding decade, particularly in England, where the crisis broke out. The following crisis of 1836-1839 was similarly the result of heavy investments in the construction of

means of transportation. The crisis of 1847 was provoked by the feverish building of railroads in England (from 1844 to 1847, in three years, the British Parliament gave railway concessions to the value of 15 billion dollars). In each of the three mentioned cases, a crisis came after new bases for capitalist development were established. In 1857, the same result was brought by the abrupt opening of new markets for European industry in America and Australia, after the discovery of the gold mines, and the extensive construction of railway lines, especially in France, where the example of England was then closely imitated. (From 1852 to 1856, new railway lines to the value of 1,250 million francs were built in France alone). And finally we have the great crisis of 1873—a direct consequence of the firm boom of large industry in Germany and Austria, which followed the political events of 1866 and 1871.

So that up to now, the sudden extension of the domain of capitalist economy, and not its shrinking, was each time the cause of the commercial crisis. That the international crisis repeated themselves precisely every ten years was a purely exterior fact, a matter of chance. The Marxist formula for crises as presented by Engels in *Anti-Duhring* and by Marx in the first and third volumes of *Capital*, applies to all crises only in the measure that it uncovers their international mechanism and their general basic causes.

Crises may repeat themselves every five or ten years, or even every eight or twenty years. But what proves best the falseness of Bernstein's theory is that it is in the countries having the greatest development of the famous "means of adaptation"—credit, perfected communications and trusts—that the last crisis (1907-1908) was most violent.

The belief that capitalist production could "adapt" itself to exchange presupposes one of two things: either the world market can spread unlimitedly, or on the contrary the development of the productive forces is so fettered that it cannot pass beyond the bounds of the market. The first hypothesis constitutes a material impossibility. The second is rendered just as impossible by the constant technical progress that daily creates new productive forces in all branches.

There remains still another phenomenon which, says Bernstein, contradicts the course of capitalist development as it is indicated above. In the "steadfast phalanx" of middle-size enterprises, Bernstein sees a sign that the development of large industry does not move in a revolutionary direction, and is not as effective from the angle of the concentration of industry as was expected by the "theory" of collapse. He is here, however, the victim of his own lack of understanding. For to see the progressive disappearance of large industry is to misunderstand sadly the nature of this process.

According to Marxist theory, small capitalists play in the general course of capitalist development the role of pioneers of technical change. They possess that role in a double sense. They initiate new methods of production in well-established branches of industry; they are instrumental in the creation of new branches of production not yet exploited by the big capitalist. It is false to imagine that the history of the middle-size capitalist establishments proceeds rectilinearly in the direction of their progressive disappearance. The course of this development is on the contrary purely dialectical and moves constantly among contradictions. The middle capitalist layers find themselves, just like the workers, under the influence of two antagonistic tendencies, one ascendant, the other descendant. In this case, the descendent tendency is the continued rise of the scale of production, which overflows periodically the dimensions of the average size parcels of capital and removes them repeatedly from the terrain of world competition.

The ascendant tendency is, first, the periodic depreciation of the existing capital, which lowers again, for a certain time, the scale of production in proportion to the value of the necessary minimum amount of capital. It is represented, besides, by the penetration of capitalist production into new spheres. The struggle of the average size enterprise against big Capital cannot be considered a regularly proceeding battle in which the troops of the weaker party continue to melt away directly and quantitatively. It should be rather regarded as a periodic mowing down of the small enterprises, which rapidly grow up again, only to be mowed down once more by large industry. The two tendencies play ball with the middle capitalist layers. The descending tendency must win in the end.

The very opposite is true about the development of the working class. The victory of the descending tendency must not necessarily show itself in an absolute numerical diminution of the middle-size enterprises. It must show itself, first in the progressive increase of the minimum amount of capital necessary for the functioning of the enterprises in the old branches of production; second in the constant diminution of the interval of time during which the small capitalists conserve the opportunity to exploit the new branches of production. The result as far as the small capitalist is concerned, is a progressively shorter duration of his stay in the new industry and a progressively more rapid change in the methods of production as a field for investment. For the average capitalist strata, taken as a whole, there is a process of more and more rapid social assimilation and dissimilation.

Bernstein knows this perfectly well. He himself comments on this. But what he seems to forget is that this very thing is the law of the movement of the average capitalist enterprise. If one admits that small capitalists are pioneers of technical progress, and if it true that the latter is the vital pulse of the capitalist economy, then it is manifest that small capitalists are an integral part of capitalist development, which can only disappear together with it [capitalist development].

The progressive disappearance of the middle-size enterprise—in the absolute sense considered by Bernstein—means not, as he things, the revolutionary course of capitalist development, but precisely the contrary, the cessation, the slowing up of development. "The rate of profit, that is to say, the relative increase of capital," said Marx, "is important first of all for new investors of capital, grouping themselves independently. And as soon as the formation of capital falls exclusively into a handful of big capitalists, the revivifying fire of production is extinguished. It dies away."

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1900/reform-revolution/index.htm>

John F. C. Turner, *Housing by People*, 1976

Chapter 1: Who Decides?

The Central Issue

The sometimes true story about the architects and planners who preserve some of the slums that are cleared to make way for their schemes, in order to have somewhere pleasant to live themselves, has a moral which is the theme of this working paper. The recent publication of an issue of the *Journal of the Royal Institute of British Architects* with the word CRISIS in red letters the height of its black cover, and the decision of homeless working-class families to take over a vacant block of Council flats in the East End of London, are typical indicators of the simultaneous loss of confidence in the ways we have been building by those who decide and enough to be forgotten by most of us most of the time. As the traditional words put it: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. It is a shock to think that this might apply to all of us all of the time, even when we are acting as officially certified experts on other people's problems. But now that architects and planners as well as the other professions are confronted with a rapidly rising consciousness of their incompetence to decide for others what is best for them, as well as the generally unpopular nature of what they design, the now rather stale joke rarely fails to provoke a nervous laugh.

Who decides what for whom is the central issue of this and other chapters to follow on housing and human settlement. It is an issue that is shared with a large and rapidly growing proportion of all who supply and receive centrally administered social services. The occasionally literal collapse and the increasingly frequent demolition of recently built public housing in highly institutionalized countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, is paralleled by equally accelerating crises in the school Systems and the health services. It is wrong to suppose that the revolt is by the dissatisfied users alone, as the RIBA report shows; those who earn their living as experts are among the most articulate critics.

No one denies the universal need for homes any more than the importance of learning or keeping in good health. But many have come to identify these ends with the ways and means that turn them into products. Housing has commonly come to mean the current stock of dwelling units and the capability of large building and management organizations to provide more. Learning is now commonly understood to be synonymous with education and this, in turn, with schooling and even with the institutions that award certificates. In the same way, good health has become bound to health services, and these in turn to hospitals. And so it goes for all everyday needs and for what must also be everyday activities if they are to be properly satisfied. The alienation of everyday life by organizations that reify activities and institutionalize their values deprives the vast majority of us, as Edward Sapir wrote: 'of any but an insignificant and culturally abortive share in the satisfaction of the immediate wants of mankind, so that we are further deprived of both opportunity and stimulation to share in the production of new utilitarian values. Part of the time we are drayhorses; the rest of the time we are listless consumers of goods which have received no least impress of our personality' [Edward Sapir, *Culture, Genuine and Spurious* in Edward Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality, Selected Essays*, ed. by David G. Mandelbaum, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1954].

The issue of who decides and who does what for whom, is a question of *how* we house ourselves, *how* we learn, *how* we keep healthy. This discussion can only take place between those who can separate the ways and means from the ends, and who are therefore able to question the commercialized or institutionalized values of modern societies.

The chapters that follow are about two sets of ways and means - the ways and means of centrally administrated systems, and those of self-governing, local systems. These ways and means generate very different immediate ends, which are the things that concern us in the first place.

Richard Barnet and Ronald Muller ask the key question: 'Can we organize the planet through centralizing technologies into ever-larger pyramidal structures?' [Richard J. Barnet and Ronald E. Muller, *Global Reach: The Power of the;Multinational Corporations*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1974] If the environments resulting from such systems are an indication of the results they produce in other spheres of life, then the answer is 'No'. Only a rich minority can be supplied in these centrally administered ways using centralizing technologies, and then only at the expense of an impoverished majority and the rapid exhaustion or poisoning of the planet's resources. This 'supreme political issue of our time', as Barnet and Muller rightly call it, is the choice between heteronomy (other-determined) and autonomy (self-determined) in personal and local matters.

While it may be ridiculous to imagine a well-populated world without world-wide organizations and authorities - without which telecommunication, for example, could hardly exist - it is absurd to think of a World Housing Authority centralizing humanity's supply of dwelling units. Where the absurd is a partial reality as in the internationalization of agriculture, the danger of disastrous commodity shortages has never been so great or imminent. In historical fact, good housing like plentiful food, is more common where it is locally produced through network structures and decentralizing technologies. *The thesis in this book is that these are the only ways and means through which satisfactory goods and services can be obtained, and that they are vital for a stable planet.*

The mirage of development

When told in a Third World context, the story of the slum conserving architects is even more relevant to our theme. An English friend, working on a job in the Middle East, told me how a firm of consultants carefully conserved, for their own use, a few buildings in the old town which they had been employed to 'redevelop'. The traditional, thick-walled courtyard houses and narrow streets provided maximum shade and natural air-conditioning. This was very sensible in view of the high costs and breakdown risks of building and living in mechanically conditioned glass and concrete structures in very hot climates. In this case, and in many countries that have only recently achieved political independence, there was no question of social upgrading. The original upper-class owners and residents had already moved out of their dense, shaded and inward-looking traditional neighbourhoods into exposed, western-style suburbs as fast as they could get their imported consultants to design and direct their construction. Unfortunately for the consultants themselves, their exceedingly hospitable Arab clients would not return to their previous homes, even to visit their guest employees. Communication between professional and client was therefore greatly reduced, though not quite as much, perhaps, as it is between the planners and designers of most modern housing developments, and those who have to live in, pay and care for them.

When reflecting on the horrors of our own urban-industrial world, or on the even more nightmarish consequences of managerial post-industrialism, we must remember that the mirage-like reflections seen by the great majority of the world's population do in fact provide glimpses of a vastly higher material standard of living. I was sharply reminded of this recently when talking to the mayor of a small, rural Middle-Eastern town who had taken a planning course in Europe and was familiar with his European wife's redeveloped home town. He was - and is - determined to turn his district of scattered peasant villages into a tourist-based city as close as possible to the alienating models we are trying to get rid of. When such clients have large sums of unstable foreign currency to spend, there are lots of opportunities for the unscrupulous (on both sides, of course). The government of this particular country has committed itself to the purchase of pre-fabricated building systems -

the most uneconomic, socially dysfunctional, and materially unstable constructions ever devised.

This truly destructive mirage will fade only as the producers and users abandon the distant original models, and as those that thirst after it see how small the pool of that kind of wealth is in relation to the immense numbers crawling towards it.

There are, of course, other reasons why those disillusioned with their own ways, and trying to withdraw from their addictions, should put their own house in order before preaching to those looking forward to, or even experiencing their first intoxication. As the already considerable literature on world economy of the past ten years or so proves to all but the most entrenched or naive reactionaries, the growth of urban-industrialism is not a linear process in which the still poor will take off in the wake of their wealthy and benign tutors. It should now be clear to anyone that follows current world affairs, let alone those that study specific aspects of change in the world today, that there are but three alternative futures.

Firstly, if current rates of consumption and pollution continue, the biosphere is likely to become incapable of supporting higher forms of life long before mineral resources are exhausted. The more people who join the feast of modern consumption, the sooner this will happen. The protests against the Club of Rome's first *Limits to Growth* report, boiled down to the quite reasonable conclusion that it is absurd to make such projections as there are multiple feed-backs in the over-all system (which Meadows et al grossly oversimplified), which will surely make corrections.

The kind of corrections most representatives of rich nations suggest provides the second alternative in which the rich level off their growth - but at a very high level and, implicitly, at the expense of the majority for whom there is no room at the feast and who must be kept at a much lower level to supply the others.

The third and only alternative that is both just and secure, is for the affluent society of wastemakers to reduce their levels of consumption to that which is safe for all to share. We have no right whatsoever to tell others to tighten their belts while our own bellies protrude so much that we cannot see the poverty we stand on.

It is a dismaying prospect - and a politically naive one - if it is assumed that we are fully dependent on pyramidal structures and centralizing technologies. If that were the case, the politically inconceivable but only route to survival would be a vast rationing scheme, administered by world agencies, for food, clothing, housing and all other essential services

It is a stimulating and hopeful prospect, on the other hand, if the opposite position is taken on the supreme political issue. If the possibilities of self-governing network

structures and decentralizing technologies are realized -that is, those which do not demand highly centralized production, distribution, or servicing systems - and if the intrinsically oppressive wastefulness of heteronomous structures is also generally recognized, then those concerned with the future will take whatever action they can in order to become independent of destructively centralist organizations and thus they will institute an alternative and viable world order.

Autonomy and heteronomy

The partially unsolved problem is to identify the practical and necessary limits to heteronomy and its opposite, autonomy. In this and following chapters it is argued that housing and, by implication, all other personal and locally specific services, must be autonomous. It is also argued that this autonomy is far from absolute - for it depends on access to essential resources. In housing, for instance, local autonomy and direct or indirect dweller-control depend on the availability of appropriate tools and materials (or technology), of land and finance. In general, the accessibility of these basic resources is a function of law and its administration, and these, in turn are functions of central authority

Thus we return to the traditional questions of human institutions and authority. But liberated from the distortions introduced by false expectation of mass-produced personal services, and with a vastly greater range of lightweight, low-powered, potentially decentralizing technologies the possibilities of effective action by local groups and associations, and of rapid general change, are vast and immediate. In relatively open societies such as those of Western Europe and North America this point is illustrated by the telephone.

Although most students and professional architects and planners dutifully visit their masters' and each other's works, few choose to live in them. Even those who can afford to do so seem to prefer places that were built by master craftsmen, artisans or ordinary folk, according to local rules and customs. How many admirers of Brasilia (Fig. 1), for example, stay there longer than necessary to see the principal buildings and, perhaps, one of the super-blocks? And how many designers of such places, prefer to spend their holidays in places like Mykonos? The escalating prices of the diminishing supply of 'architecture without architects' limits its use to those with money. And this, in the urban-industrial world, largely limits the buyers, and even transient visitors, to those that serve the organizations that inhibit and destroy what they seek with their earnings

The more aware we become of the social costs of massive housing schemes, and of high-rise buildings, for those that cannot move about at will - the very young, the very old, and unassisted housewives - the greater are the efforts to counter the administrative and economic limitations imposed by sponsors and producers. The very wealthy can effectively demand costly simulations of traditional forms, while

relatively wealthy governments can often be persuaded by their advisers to balance social against additional material costs). More recently, and in response to more perceptive analyses of the social psychology of alienation, as well as to direct pressures from local groups of angry voters, citizen participation has even been built into planning and building law, as in Britain; or as a prerequisite for Federal support, as in the United States. Like the variety and smallness the wealthy seek, participation also costs more when it has to be built into central agencies' programmes. The desirability of small scale, variety, and participation in highly institutionalized contexts, is not at issue. The great majority of policy-makers and administrators, planners, architects, and laymen, when they are informed, agree that it is only a problem of cost and productivity.

Few, however, yet raise the *issue* of the feasibility of human scale, variety, and participation or responsibility in housing and human settlement. In the view of those that take the modern system for granted, the matter rests on a mis-stated *problem* of streamlining and acceleration or of altering priorities so as to get more money from the budget.

Many of those who mistakenly suppose that the problem of housing in rich countries is lack of money or the slow pace of existing production machinery, would really like to see uniform housing estates segregating categories of people, maybe muted by the current fashion for community participation and the personalization of consumer goods and services. The more perceptive are undoubtedly comforted by the knowledge that these cost money and are therefore unlikely to survive in an inflationary world. The real test of who stands where on the real issues comes when consumers break out of their institutionalized roles, and become producers and administrators. Then the emotional disturbance of those who fear freedom surfaces at once.

Those who deny that 'the only freedom of the slightest importance is the freedom to change one's commitments' and one's roles, are denying the greatest gain made since the Middle Ages. Ironically, the combination of a feudal attitude to social classes with the institutionalization of personal services actually reduces existential freedom - especially in the sphere of everyday activity. The rich of the modern world have made immense gains in social and geographic mobility and they consume enormous quantities of matter. But this has only been achieved thanks to the division of labour and the segregation of classes on a massive world-wide scale, and to the abandonment of local and personal control over the way we feed, clothe and house ourselves.

Paternalism and filialism, the modern descendants of attitudes more generally associated by Europeans with the Middle Ages, are still very common attitudes in Britain. These are especially evident in the common assumption that the 'ordinary' citizen or 'layman', is utterly dependent on the 'extraordinary' citizen or the

'professional', who cultivates the mystery of his or her activity in order to increase dependency and professional fees. However, citizens are at last getting wise in rapidly increasing numbers. This has been encouraged by the radicalization and incipient deprofessionalization of the institutionally 'closed shops'. Personal capability is at last resurfacing after the urban-industrial flood.

The most dramatic proof is in the 'upper-lower income countries' of the Third World, such as Greece and Turkey, or Chile and Peru. Examples of what non-professionals can achieve for themselves, are doing much to awaken their wealthy exploiters to the issues discussed here. For some of those in power, this has been a very rude awakening. A friend and an acquaintance of mine were visiting the vast *urbanizaciones popu/ares* of Arequipa Peru, some time in the mid-1950s. Hernan Bedoya, then director of the regional branch of the national urban planning office (ONPU), was showing the rapidly self-improving squatter settlements to Pedro Beltran, then owner and editor of *La Prensa*, a major national newspaper, and president of the newly formed commission for housing and agricultural reform (and later Minister of Finance and Prime Minister). Almost every plot around them was a building site with permanent structures of white tufa stone, or brick and concrete under construction; and the area they were visiting was already about five kilometres wide and two deep. Beltran saw a vast shanty town, instead of a huge construction site. Bedoya was speechless when Beltran went on to speak of his determination to rid these poor people of their dreadful slums which were in fact their pride and joy. This incident was echoed when in 1964, on days closely following one another, I took a visiting British Minister of State and a visiting colleague experienced in community development in Africa, to similar settlements in Lima. Both were profoundly impressed - but in opposite ways. The minister was depressed, the community worker delighted.

It is easy to anticipate how wealthy observers feel when confronted with such overwhelming demonstrations of local actions from which they cannot insulate themselves with misplaced pity.

Very deep changes of attitude have to take place before traditional politicians and 'unreconstructed' professionals can really serve ordinary people as they pretend. This was demonstrated in a remarkable dialogue between representatives of *Nueva Habana* - the well-known Chilean *campamento* shown in the film of that name- and an official of the Allende government. In this perhaps typical case of a people attempting to revolutionize the power structure and change the role of government, the well-meaning administrator was unable to imagine that the people could teach their own children, and that all he had to do was to authorize them and provide a few resources - at a vastly lower cost per child than the system which the bureaucrat was hopelessly locked into. The only bureaucratically conceivable role of government is the administration of services to dependent and implicitly ignorant and incapable beneficiaries. And, as the Chileans and Peruvians have done,

'ordinary people' - that is, all of us as citizens - have to slough off the vestiges of cap-touching filialism and demand that those in power help us do what we can do locally for ourselves - by guaranteeing our access to fair shares of available resources - and where essential, by providing complementary infrastructure that cannot be installed locally and that can be provided for all.

Networks and hierarchies

The popularity of the book *Architecture without Architects* and the success of the exhibition it was taken from only demonstrate architects' common preference for architecture that has not been designed by architects. And it is confirmation of the thesis that culture literally comes from the cultivation of the soil. Le Corbusier's notebooks are full of sketches of traditional Mediterranean buildings. Although many architects do make sketches as Le Corbusier did and many planners believe with Doxiadis that genuine culture is a process of refinement from the grass-roots up, it is difficult to act on these intuitions or convictions and make even a modest living as an architect.

Although the professional mystification of everyday activities and the related specialized skills are blameworthy, professionals tend to over-blame themselves. It is inverted presumption for them to assume responsibilities that pertain to those that employ them, and to society as a whole. Excessive self-recrimination can paralyze the power to act.

At best, the remorseful activist will abandon the field in which he has most potential power and influence in order to 'change the system' on the false assumption that the system is something apart from the process of building. This, in turn, implies that the supply of buildings, of houses for example, is a function and dependent variable of a political superstructure. The autonomously developed settlements of Lima and Arequipa show that this is something less than a half-truth, whether considered politically or as an incipient language or culture of building. The contemporary if fragile dynamism of the awakening people of countries like Chile and Peru, in the shape of its building as well as of its political action, is what attracts so many who would be literal 'architects', and who seize opportunities as long as they haven't paralyzed themselves with guilt or ambition for wealth.

The reason it is so difficult to earn a living as a would-be grass-roots architect is that the only employers (or 'clients' as they are euphemistically called) are large organizations and a very small and rapidly diminishing number of wealthy individuals. And it is the former who cut off the specialist from the people he or she wishes to serve, while the latter are irrelevant except, perhaps, for providing opportunities to experiment

Where local groups and associations of ordinary citizens have formed to act for themselves - such as the *Asociaciones de Padres de Familia Pro-Vivienda* in Peru, or even self-build housing associations in Britain - they are either unaware of the good intentions and potential contributions of planners and architects, or distrustful, or scared off by the fees which their professional associations oblige the architects to charge. So, in almost all countries, the great majority of professionals, in this and most other fields, are tied to centrally administered systems.

The number of professionals large organizations employ is naturally limited and, when they are 'efficient', it is a relatively small number in proportion to the population. And on top of this, the number of professionals who have secure jobs and who are also responsible and creative, tends to be even smaller. In the longer view, this is an alarming prospect and a morally depressing one. Future livelihoods, as well as the freedom to live responsibly and work creatively, are at stake.

To clarify the differences between an institutionalized and a would-be grass roots professional, the decision-making structures in each system must be understood.

The simplest way of doing this in housing is to divide the process of decision-making into three easily recognizable sets of operations:

- planning, or operations that generally precede construction
- construction or building operations,
- the management and maintenance of what is built, necessarily following the greater part of the building operations.

These sets of operations should be distributed between the three common sets of actors that is, those persons, groups, enterprises, or institutions that control the resources for the process itself;

- the users,
- the suppliers,
- the regulators.

For simplicity and brevity, I will distort the model a little by matching these three functional sets of actors with three sectors:













- the popular sector, the users,
- the private commercial sector, the suppliers,
- the public sector or government, the regulators.

By and large in the so-called free market and in mixed economies, these three sectors are clearly distinguishable, even though the former two are almost always treated as a homogenous whole. This convention for seeing the users and the commercial suppliers as one and the same thing - the private sector - is too violent a distortion of the way things actually work. The motives and values of private

users, and small producers, are substantially different from most commercial producers or suppliers in a modern society.

Large commercial organizations, or 'growth enterprises' exist to maximize financial returns for third parties, or to perpetuate or expand the organization itself, or all three. Though profitability is often a major factor in individual householders' or house-seekers' behaviour, use-values generally predominate - just as most small businesses are maintained for the livelihood of those that run them rather than for investors or for the sake of the enterprise as an institution. The public sector, or public agencies, on the other hand, are motivated primarily by the broad political purpose of maintaining their authority over the public order - even though this can be distorted by commercial motives.

The patterns of decision and control describing the two opposite systems are mirror images of one another, as their diagrammatic representation shows. (Figs. 8, 9).

<u>Plan</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Manage</u>		<u>Plan</u>	<u>Construct</u>	<u>Manage</u>	
			Regulators or Public Sector				
			Suppliers or Private (commercial) Sector				
			Users or Popular Sector				
<u>Locally self-governing or autonomous housing systems</u>				<u>Centrally administered or heteronomous housing systems</u>			

The organizations represented by these two patterns are totally different. When both normative or rule-making and operational or gameplaying powers are centralized, decisions flow from a peak of authority down through divisions of labour at successive levels to the base. There, whatever is left of the resources funnelled through the system are supplied as categorical goods or services; that is, categories of institutionally designed products are made available to institutionally defined categories of consumers. But when rule-making and game-playing decisions are separated (along with an umpire to complete the democratic principle of separate legislative, executive and judicial powers), an entirely different structure emerges: a non-hierarchic network of autonomous, or semiautonomous decision-makers, free to combine as they will, as long as they stay within limits set by the rules.

The rules of such democratic games must act as *limits* to action, rather than as prescribed *lines* of action. Those unfamiliar with the vital difference between proscriptive law ('Thou shalt nots') and prescriptive law ('Thou shalts'), and who wrongly suppose that proscriptions limit freedom, should consider the difference between moving between any two positions along railway lines in a marshalling yard which must be followed and between any two positions along streets in a city which are defined by boundaries which may not be crossed.

This exercise illustrates the principles of equifinality and requisite variety which are essential to freedom and genuine culture, and without which peoples' needs can never be satisfied. Equifinality - a word that has not even made the OED *Supplement* - is the systems-term for the multiplicity of routes to the same end. It emphasizes the often forgotten interdependent variability of ways, means and ends.

To continue the analogy of the railway lines and streets, the former can be used with only one type of vehicle - trains. The latter, on the other hand, can be used by pedestrians, riders of animals, human or animal drawn vehicles, motor vehicles, or bicycles. There are a very limited number of stations in the railway system, but the street user can stop anywhere without blocking the way for others - as long as his vehicle isn't too big in proportion to the traffic flow. And, of course, the number of routes and combinations of routes and vehicles between any two points in each system varies from one in the authoritarian line system to a very large number indeed in the democratic limit system

The significance of these facts is stated by Ashby's Principle of Requisite Variety: If stability (of a system) is to be attained, the variety of the controlling system must be at least as great as the variety of the system to be controlled¹⁰. [W. R. Ashby, *Self-regulation and Requisite Variety*, chapter 11 of *Introduction to Cybernetics*, Wiley, 1956, reprinted in *Systems Thinking*, ed. by F E. Emery, Penguin Modern Management Readings, London, 1969]. In housing, this implies that there must be as large a number of decision-makers, or controllers, as variations demanded for the maintenance of a stable housing system. The coincidence of extreme instability in modern housing systems, and their rigidly hierarchic nature, supports this proposition. In Britain, for example, there is a polarization of two dominant systems - the public sector and the private commercial sector. To an increasing extent both are controlled by 'ever-larger pyramidal structures', by a rapidly decreasing number of 'local' authorities in the public sector, and speculative developers in the private, commercial sector. This has already resulted in grossly coarse-grained cities which exclude those who fail to fit the officially or commercially specified categories. The inevitable consequences have been gross misfits and mismatches, and a growing proportion of homelessness.

The high and inevitably spiralling costs of hierarchic systems (as will be explained later) have created a disproportionate dependency on borrowed capital. The result of this has been that the servicing of most homes exceeds the reasonable limits of what most occupiers can pay - and, collectively, the limit of what government can afford from national income without upsetting the economy as a whole. (According to recent estimates, British public housing tenants pay 40 per cent of the average costs - and nearly one third of all dwellings in Britain are publicly owned). In planned and market economies alike, these hierarchic systems are collapsing financially, sometimes socially, and even physically.

Systems generated or maintained by network structures, on the other hand, flourish. They only lose their stability and die as a result of actions or inactions by hierarchic structures whose interests are threatened.



Business Day, Johannesburg, 7 July 2006

Thinking out of the matchbox

Glen Mills

SA, ARGUABLY, is not known for its design culture. It is certainly not a fountainhead of good design. Take minimum-cost housing. It's a disaster. This is a sector that is alive with design potential. Yet, from a design point of view, our housing fails on several counts. Here are a few to think about. First, urban form. Housing, from a technical point of view, provides one of the most important instruments for shaping urban form, for creating an urban culture and for enabling urbanisation. For that reason, housing design cannot be determined in isolation. It can't be produced without regard for the other building types and spatial requirements that make for viable, vibrant and quality urban living environments.

In SA, housing continues to be designed and built in seclusion, usually in townships at the edges of the city, away from economic and cultural opportunities.

Second, integration. Housing needs to form part of mixed-use developments if it is to enable the building of integrated communities. Different building densities, a variety of humanly scaled public spaces and integrated transportation and movement configurations characterise those communities' environments.

This is not the case in SA, where rigidly zoned housing developments, especially for the urban poor, sterilise spontaneous activities that build amalgamated communities.

Third, sustainability. Housing must be rooted in the fundamental principles of architectural and urban design. These principles have to do with city forms that are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable. For that to happen they need at least to be compact and pedestrian-friendly. Township sprawl is expansive and expensive.

Fourth, technology. Housing is, in effect, an intersection of different technologies, where technology may be regarded as a fusion of knowledge, skills and tools. Most technologies that affect the conditions of life and economic prospects of societies are systemic, in that they traverse disciplinary lines and consequently demonstrate strong complementarities among diverse design thrusts.

In SA we disrupt both the intersection and the complementarity of technologies by treating each in isolation. For example, a technology focused on, say, finance is treated separately from other technologies that affect design. This artificial separation is perhaps a significant reason why housing in SA is designed from a one-sided, as opposed to a holistic, point of view.

Reconstruction and development programme (RDP) houses might be viable, or so we are told, from a capital-expenditure point of view, but they fail badly on just about all other design counts. That's no solution to the problem; it is a prominent feature of the problem itself.

Fifth, user involvement. Housing produced on a large scale must optimise end-user involvement. People need to be part of the design, construction, maintenance and management of their houses and neighbourhood spaces. This enables people to exercise choice, not just about design but about things like tenure as well.

Yet, in SA, user involvement is stymied because the bureaucratic machinery of commercial and political forces commandeers the housing delivery process. The outcomes are products valued mainly as marketable and political articles of trade, at the expense of other social and cultural values.

So, our housing designs are broke: they don't work! Like the people it tries to accommodate, the country's stockpile of 21st century housing, designed for, not with, the poor, is itself impoverished. There's no evidence of design creativity in what is inherently a design-prone enterprise, one that lends itself to imagination and innovation.

We've therefore got to ask this question: is this the best that the battalions of politicians, consultants, bureaucrats, financiers, developers and contractors can do? After all, these are the "experts" who keep watch over what is produced. If this is their best, then we have a colossal economic and environmental burden that we, as well as future generations, are going to pay for.

Compared with our political past, it seems very little has changed in the way we imagine and innovate minimum-cost housing. We're still reproducing yesterday's dysfunctional township design. Visit any post-1994 city-rim housing estate, compare it with any apartheid-era township and you'll see and sense the grim evidence of this: the pollution, the bleakness, the crime, the isolation, the separation, the lined-up rows of little boxes, the lack of design choice, the wasted opportunity.

But maybe something has changed. You see, from a purely quantitative point of view, we've certainly been busy chipping away at production targets. Big ones. And we are rolling it out at quite a rate, in row upon row of little boxes, sometimes in different colours. In fact we've planted more than 1,5-million of the things since 1994. Not only are we good at moving lots of people into lots of little houses, we also give those people lots of colours to choose from.

Now that's different to what the previous bunch did, isn't it? Sure, but there's a catch. The shortage, or backlog, of subsidised boxes seems continuously to outpace the scorecard. No matter how fast we crank the stuff out, the demand, according to our backlog calculations of course, keeps on outstripping supply. This means we sit with two problems. First, from a quantitative perspective, no matter how hard we try, we still can't crack the backlog. Second, from a qualitative perspective, we need urgently to dump our culture of bad design and invent a new tradition of design excellence. In other words, how can we produce both quantity and quality at the same time?

Maybe the clue to both solutions is in front of our face: the end users, or dwellers, themselves. Consider what John FC Turner, the internationally renowned housing specialist, said about user participation more than 30 years ago: "When dwellers control the major decisions and are free to make their own contributions in the design, construction, or management of their housing, both this process and the environment produced stimulate individual and social wellbeing. When people have no control over, nor responsibility for, key decisions in the housing process, on the other hand, dwelling environments may instead become a barrier to personal fulfilment and a burden on the economy."

Turner's observation confirms a solid planning principle about the intrinsic worth of dweller autonomy. Following Turner, "autonomy means interdependent self-management, not independent self-sufficiency".

Dweller autonomy is thus the opposite of SA's top-down approach that, because it imposes badly designed one-size-fits-all houses and townships on dwellers, it arrests "personal fulfilment and is a burden on the economy".

However, dweller autonomy can only happen if political and commercial role players install the right support systems and enabling procedures. This is necessary for people to become "interdependent self-managers" and to realise their full creative potential.

The will and ability of dwellers to participate in the creation of housing is already there. Take a look at any informal settlement and you'll see houses designed and assembled by their occupants all day, every day.

Whether this will and ability are matched by the will and ability of political and commercial interests is the burning question. The answer will, from a design point of view, determine whether it is business as usual or the beginning of radical change.

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